Appendix B: Accreditation

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APPENDIX B: ACCREDITATION

A. Overview

1. *What is museum accreditation?*

In the United States, the American Association of Museums (AAM) operates a museum accreditation program. The program assesses how well a museum meets current professional standards. The assessment process involves self-study by the museum as well as peer review. The AAM Accreditation Commission, composed of appointed members of the museum community, grants accreditation status to museums that meet the generally accepted standards. The Commission reviews an accredited museum's status every five to ten years.

2. *What institutions are eligible to apply?*

Applicants must meet eligibility criteria and demonstrate the characteristics of an accreditable museum as published by the AAM. Application information is on the AAM Web site at http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/apply.cfm. See Section A.8 for additional information.

Park museums that have been open for at least two years, have public exhibits, and are operating according to NPS policies and procedures are likely to meet the AAM accreditation eligibility criteria.

In addition, NPS requires that parks meet the following requirements before applying for accreditation:

- All collections are accessioned.

- All collections are cataloged *or* the park has an approved action plan that addresses cataloging of the backlog (park-approved Project Management Information System [PMIS] Project Statement for backlog cataloging).

- Collections are adequately stored, secured, and protected by fire detection and suppression systems, *or* the park has approved program management plans (such as the park resource stewardship strategy and the Collection Management Plan) that address the correction of deficiencies identified on the NPS Checklist for Preservation and Protection of Museum Collections (Museum Checklist).

- An approved Scope of Collection Statement is in effect.

- Exhibits are relevant to the park mission and adequately maintained.

3. *Why should a park museum apply for accreditation?*

Accreditation provides review and recognition of the park's museum programs and operations by the museum profession. It offers the benefits of ongoing critical self-evaluation and peer review. Accreditation gains public recognition, which attracts volunteers and visitors. It also facilitates loans, traveling exhibitions, and fundraising to support park museum operations.

4.	*What does accreditation involve?*	The accreditation process involves the following steps:

- Park reviews information about accreditation, including tips for preparedness, tools for determining readiness, and eligibility criteria, on the AAM Web site.

- Park consults with regional curator about accreditation.

- Park requests approval to apply and Regional Director grants approval or identifies improvements needed.

- Park completes and submits the application form. When the application is accepted, the AAM will bill the park for the application fee of $400. The park should pay this fee with the charge card.

- Park completes self-study.

- AAM Accreditation Commission reviews self-study and grants interim approval, tables interim approval pending submission of clarifying information or correction of deficiencies within six to twelve months, or denies interim approval. Interim approval is necessary to continue in the accreditation process.

- Park reviews list of potential Visiting Committee members that AAM provides, noting any conflicts of interest.

- AAM selects the Visiting Committee Team Contact who then selects a second team member and schedules the visit directly with the park superintendent.

- Visiting Committee visits park.

- Visiting Committee submits report to AAM Accreditation Commission.

- Accreditation Commission reviews the report and grants accreditation, tables the decision pending correction of identified concerns within one year, denies accreditation, or defers a decision pending submission of additional clarifying information.

- AAM initiates mandatory subsequent review of accreditation within ten years (or within five years if the museum was identified for early subsequent review at the time of accreditation).

See Section B for step-by-step procedures in the accreditation process.

5.	*How long will accreditation take?*	Generally, the initial accreditation process requires 31-43 months and the subsequent review takes 27-38 months. The process varies for each museum depending on such factors as the:

- time the park takes to prepare the documents

- scheduling of Accreditation Commission reviews and follow-up actions if tabling, denials, or deferrals are involved

- time required to schedule the Visiting Committee

See the "Quick Reference Guide to the Accreditation Review Process" on the AAM Web site.

6. *How much will accreditation cost the park?*

The accreditation process represents a significant commitment of park staff time. In addition, the park pays accreditation fees and travel expenses.

AAM bills the park for accreditation fees and the park uses the charge card to pay:

- a non-refundable one-time application fee billed following acceptance of the application ($400; subject to change). This fee is not required for subsequent reviews.

- an annual participation fee billed each January for accredited museums and applicants ($200 for members; $500 for non-members; both subject to change).

For the Visiting Committee's travel expenses, the park must issue a purchase order to the AAM in advance of the visit for the Visiting Committee's services. The cost estimate should be based on the anticipated travel expenses of the Visiting Committee. Following the visit, the AAM will bill the park for the Visiting Committee's costs.

7. *What funds are available for accreditation?*

Parks may use appropriated funds and donated funds, including cooperating association funds, to pay accreditation fees.

8. *Where can I get an application and further information?*

Complete information on the Accreditation Program, a downloadable application form, and information on ordering an Accreditation Resource Kit are on the AAM Web site at http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/apply.cfm.

The Accreditation Resource Kit includes the following publications:

- *A Higher Standard: The Museum Accreditation Handbook.* This publication is the definitive guide to the accreditation process and a preview of what is expected of an accredited institution.

- *The Accreditation Self-Study Guide.* This booklet provides a framework for the institution to conduct a self-evaluation of its operations and for application to the accreditation program.

- *The Accreditation Self-Study Guide on CD-ROM*

You may also order the Accreditation Resource Kit from the AAM

Bookstore by mail, telephone, or via the online catalog:

AAM Bookstore
1575 Eye Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 289-9127
E-mail: bookstore@aam-us.org
http://www.aam-us.org/bookstore/index.cfm

AAM Accreditation Program
1575 Eye St. N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 289-9116
E-mail: accreditation@aam-us.org

> *If you are interested in gaining accreditation for the park museum, be sure to consult the regional curator as far in advance as possible. The region may have additional guidelines and procedures for the park to follow. Also, the regional curator can provide helpful information, insight, and support throughout the process.*

B. Accreditation Step-by-Step

Step 1: Consultation

Consult with the regional curator about the park's readiness to apply for accreditation. Confirm that the park meets AAM and NPS eligibility criteria. See Section A.2. If the park doesn't meet the eligibility criteria, correct the deficiencies and repeat Step 1.

Note: During the application or accreditation process the park, regional office, or the Accreditation Commission may identify deficiencies that the park needs to correct before going to the next step.

Step 2: Regional Director Approval

Request Regional Director approval to apply for accreditation. The Regional Director, upon the recommendation of the regional curator, grants approval for the park to apply for accreditation, or identifies deficiencies that the park needs to correct.

Step 3: Application

Study information on the AAM Web site at http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/index.cfm. Download and complete the application. Consult the regional curator and submit the application to the AAM. Pay the application fee when the AAM bills the park. See Section A.6.

Step 4: Self-Study

The AAM sends the Accreditation Self-Study Questionnaire to the park. Complete the self-study in consultation with the regional curator. Submit the self-study and supporting documents to the AAM within one year of the application. Use Figure B.1, "Attachments Required for Self-Study: AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents," to select supporting documents for submission with the questionnaire.

Step 5: Accreditation Commission Review of Self-Study (first-time applicants only)

The Accreditation Commission reviews the self-study and takes one of the following actions:

- Grants interim approval: the park may proceed to the next step.

- Denies interim approval: the park must withdraw its application but may reapply in the future.

- Tables the decision: the park must provide further information or clarification within six to twelve months. Upon reviewing the additional information, the Accreditation Commission will grant interim approval or deny accreditation.

Step 6: Selection of Visiting Committee

The AAM will send the park a roster of potential Visiting Committee members. Work with the regional curator to identify any conflicts of interest and return the list by the due date (generally one month). AAM selects the Visiting Committee team contact who then selects a second team member.

Step 7: Scheduling the Visiting Committee Visit

The team contact works with the park superintendent to schedule the Visiting Committee's visit. The park issues a purchase order to AAM to cover the travel expenses of the Visiting Committee. See Section A.6.

Step 8: Visiting Committee Visits Park

The Visiting Committee visits the park. AAM bills the park to cover the committee's travel expenses.

Step 9: Visiting Committee Report

The Visiting Committee submits its report to the AAM Accreditation Commission within four weeks of the visit.

Step 10: Accreditation Commission Review

The Accreditation Commission reviews the self-study and the report and takes one of the following actions:

- Grants accreditation (usually for ten years, but may be granted for only five years if the Commission has concerns)

- Denies the award

- Tables its decision for specific concerns or deficiencies to be addressed within one year

- Defers a decision if additional information is needed

The Accreditation Commission Chair sends a written notification to the park superintendent stating the decision and providing a copy of the Visiting Committee's report. The AAM separately returns the self-study materials to the park. If the park museum is accredited, the notification states the date to initiate subsequent accreditation.

Step 11: Subsequent Accreditation

On a cycle of ten (or five) years, as specified at the time of accreditation, the AAM notifies the park of the need to review the park's accredited status. This review involves Steps 4-10. (The Accreditation Commission reviews the self-study only in Step 10.) This process is called subsequent accreditation.

Attachments Required for Self-Study:
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents

Required AAM Documents	NPS Equivalents
Note: See links to document descriptions at http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/document-list.cfm	Note: For documents on the Web, provide the URL rather than hardcopy when submitting attachments for the Self-Study.
Institutional code of ethics	NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part I, Appendix D, Code of Ethics for NPS Museums (2006) at http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/index.htm.
Mission statement	NPS Mission Statement at http://www.nps.gov/legacy/mission.html. Park mission statement (Foundation Statement) is in the park's General Management Plan and in the park's strategic plan posted on the park Web site.
Institutional plan	Strategic plans show goals and accomplishments—see Park Strategic Plan available on park Web site, NPS Strategic Plan at http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/policies.html, Department of the Interior Strategic Plan at http://www.doi.gov/gpra/ (see Resource Protection Goal 3). Provide the park's Annual Performance Plan based on GPRA goals and performance using data from the Performance Management Data System at http://www.nps.gov/performance/. If the Annual Performance Plan is on the park's Web site, provide the URL. As needed, ask the park Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) coordinator to assist. Park's General Management Plan
Articles of incorporation, charter, or enabling legislation	NPS Organic Act (1916) (16 USC 1) at http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode16/usc_sup_01_16_10_1.html. Park's enabling legislation.
Bylaws, constitution, or will	NPS *Management Policies* at http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/mp/index.html.
IRS letter of notification regarding tax-exempt status	Not applicable to US Government.

Figure B. 1. Attachments Required for Self-Study:
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents

Required AAM Documents	NPS Equivalents
If the museum has a parent organization: Documentation regarding the importance of the museum to the parent, expressing its commitment to support the museum (e.g., resolution of permanence passed by parent, parent organization's by-laws or organizing documents, memorandum of understanding, or management agreement between the parent and the museum)	Park's enabling legislation. The following are optional references that may be submitted: NPS Organic Act (1916) (16 USC 1) at http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode16/usc_sup_01_16_10_1.html. Museum Act (1955) (16 USC 18f—18f-3) at http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/laws/lawregad.html. NPS *Management Policies* at http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/mp/index.html
Documentation of operational relationships with other organizations integrally connected to the museum's governance or operations (e.g., written memorandum of understanding or other type of formal agreement)	*Management Policies*, Chapter 7, section 7.6.2, Cooperating Associations, and Chapter 10, section 10.2, Concessions, at http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/mp/index.html. Cooperating Association Agreement. Concessions Contract.
List of current members of the governing authority	Secretary of the Interior; Director, National Park Service; Regional Director.
Evidence of delegation of authority for day-to-day operation of the museum to the museum director or the equivalent position	Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual, Part 145, National Park Service, Chapter 2, Basic Organization, showing delegation of authority from Director to park superintendent at http://elips.doi.gov/app_dm/act_getfiles.cfm?relnum=3642. Park superintendent is equivalent to the museum director.
Table of contents of the governance manual (i.e., reference manual assembled for use by members of the governing authority to assist with orientation, training, and ongoing work)	Table of Contents of Department of the Interior Departmental Manual available at http://elips.doi.gov/app_dm/index.cfm?fuseaction=home. National Park Service *Management Policies* and Director's Orders available at http://data2.itc.nps.gov/npspolicy/index.cfm.
Organizational chart(s) (including parent organization, governing authority, partner organization, advisory board, supporting organizations, staff, and volunteers as applicable)	NPS organization chart available at http://elips.doi.gov/app_dm/act_getfiles.cfm?relnum=3642. Park organization chart.

Figure B. 1. Attachments Required for Self-Study:
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents (continued)

Required AAM Documents	NPS Equivalents
List of principal professional and administrative staff positions (including the following for each: title, incumbent's name, salary, and employment category)	Park staff list for all supervisors showing title, name, salary, job classification series.
Position descriptions and current resumes for principal professional and administrative staff (both current and vacant positions)	Position descriptions and personal resumes for key positions in chain of command with oversight for museum operations, including superintendent.
List summarizing staffing levels (numbers) by category (e.g., administrative, curatorial, education, security, physical plant, visitor services, etc.)	Same
Personnel policies manual	Department of the Interior, Office of Human Resources, policy guidance at http://www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/curronly.htm
Repository agreement for objects in custody without title (required for some museums)	Repository Agreement and/or incoming loan agreement if park manages collections for a non-NPS entity.
Visual images to illustrate the scope of the museum's collections	If available, provide URLs for images of the park's collection on the park's Web site, in the Web Catalog at http://www.museum.nps.gov/, or on the Museum Management Program Web site at http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/. Otherwise, provide a CD of images illustrating the scope of the museum's collections (no more than 20-30 images). If possible, combine all image requirements from this chart on a single CD.
Collections management policy and loan policies (custodial care and borrowing policies for museums that do not own or manage collections, but borrow and use collections for exhibits, education, or research)	Director's Order #24, NPS Museum Collections Management at http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/DOrder24.html. NPS *Museum Handbook*, Parts I-III; *Automated National Catalog System User Manual*; and *Conserve O Gram* at http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/index.htm.
Sample copy of completed collections documentation record(s) (with accession, catalog, and inventory information)	Copies of the following records with information completed: a Catalog Record (10-254) and an All Fields Report for each of the major disciplines represented in the park's collection (archeology, ethnology, history, archives, biology, geology, paleontology); an Accession Receiving Report (10-95); an Accession Folder Cover Sheet (10-255); a Deed of Gift (10-830); a Receipt for Property (DI-105); the most recently completed annual inventory forms (10-349).

Figure B. 1. Attachments Required for Self-Study:

Required AAM Documents	NPS Equivalents
If the museum is authorized to deaccession, a copy of a deaccession form or other written documentation used for deaccessioning purposes (a completed form if applicable, otherwise a blank form)	Copy of completed Deaccession Form (10-643).
Sample copy of a completed outgoing loan agreement	Copy of completed Outgoing Loan Agreement (10-127) with Conditions (10-127a).
Sample copy of a completed incoming loan agreement	Copy of completed Incoming Loan Agreement (10-98) with Conditions (10-98a).
Sample copy of completed condition report form	Copy of completed Condition Report (10-637)
List of titles and dates of the museum's exhibit offerings during the last three years (long-term, temporary, traveling exhibits)	List of long-term, traveling, and temporary exhibits that the park has shown in last three years. Give titles, dates, and locations for exhibits.
Images of exhibits to illustrate various exhibition design techniques used (in galleries, other interiors, interpreted landscapes, other exterior settings)	Provide images of exhibits, historic structures, interiors of furnished historic structures, park features, and landscapes to illustrate exhibit design and visitor-presentation techniques. Include wayside exhibits. Exhibit producers (Harpers Ferry Center or contractors) are good sources of images. If possible, include all image requirements from this chart on a single CD.
Images that illustrate the museum's live interpretive activities in action (e.g., programs, outreach, demonstrations, tours, interpreters, classes, etc.)	Images of the park's interpretive programs (personal services). Contact the park's Chief Interpreter. If possible, combine all image requirements from this chart on a single CD.
List of museum publications and non-print media projects (print, audio, electronic) produced in the past three years (list name, format, and date)	Work with the Chief Interpreter and Chief of Resources Management to identify relevant NPS and cooperating association publications and non-print media projects, such as films, slide shows, postcards, and CDs produced in last three years. List name, media format, and date.
If the museum does original research: List of staff research results published in publications (e.g., books, popular or scholarly journals) other than the museum's in the last three years	Work with the Chief of Resources Management to identify published research results for the last three years. Contact the Inventory and Monitoring Network and the region's Archeological Center for publications relevant to the park.

Figure B. 1. Attachments Required for Self-Study:
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents (continued)

Required AAM Documents	NPS Equivalents
Most recent museum program/exhibit/events calendar	Coordinate with the Public Affairs Officer and Chief of Interpretation for the most recent park events calendar.
Samples of: promotional materials (e.g. program announcements, exhibit brochures, etc.) that illustrate the scope of the museum's interpretive offerings; materials that illustrate the range of programs for students and teachers; museum publications and/or non-print media materials (Four maximum for each category)	Same
Current year operating budget and non-operating expenditures	Provide a copy of the park's current financial plan and information on any construction program activities or other non-operating expenditures.
Audited financial statements for two years plus management letters (if most recent year is not yet available, submit unaudited year-end financial report)	NPS Performance and Accountability Reports are posted at http://www.doi.gov/pfm/burrept.html. The independent auditors' report is at the back of each year's report. Cross-reference the park's Annual Performance Plan provided above. Provide the park's Annual Performance Report based on GPRA goals and data from the Performance Management Data System at http://www.nps.gov/performance/. If this document is on the park's Web site, provide the URL.
Floor plan and/or site map	Official park brochure, plus other site maps and museum floor plans, if available.
Emergency/disaster preparedness plan (covering staff, visitors, and collections)	Park Emergency Operations Plan including the Museum Collections Emergency Operations Plan component (see *Management Policies* 8.2.5.2 and Director's Order #24, 4.3.10).
Images of the museum's public and non-public areas, both indoors and outside (e.g.: grounds, exteriors, galleries/exhibit spaces, classrooms/studios/programming spaces, sales areas, food service areas, collections processing/storage, mechanical areas, laboratories, offices, workshops, loading dock/receiving area, etc.)	Same. Provide a CD with these images. If possible, combine all image requirements from this chart on a single CD.

Figure B. 1. **Attachments Required for Self-Study:**
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents (continued)

AAM Documents, If Available	NPS Equivalents, If Available
Samples of tools the museum uses to assess whether it has achieved its goals (e.g., visitor satisfaction surveys, exhibition evaluations, program evaluations, focus group questions/reports, community surveys, financial/other performance indicators, etc.)	Strategic plans show goals and accomplishments, see Park Strategic Plan available on park Web site, NPS Strategic Plan at http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/policies.html, Department of the Interior Strategic Plan at http://www.doi.gov/gpra/ (see Resource Protection Goal 3). Recent results for Visitor Survey Card (park reports posted at http://www.psu.uidaho.edu/vsc.schedule.htm, see http://www.psu.uidaho.edu/ for additional information). Office of Management and Budget NPS Visitor Services Assessment at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/detail.10003723.2005.html. Other park-specific surveys. .
Vision/value statement(s)	Same
Documentation regarding any internal, non-governing groups that serve in an advisory capacity (e.g., resolution of the board establishing this group, statement of purpose, operating guidelines, etc.)	General information on NPS advisory and operating committees at http://www.nps.gov/policy/advisory/boardscomms.htm. National Park System Advisory Board documentation at http://www.nps.gov/policy/advisory/advboard.htm. Park-specific information, as applicable.
Table of contents of volunteer manual	Director's Order #7, Volunteers in Parks at http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/DO-7.htm.
Collections plan	Park's Collection Management Plan; Scope of Collections Statement.
Conservation plan	Park's Collection Management Plan and Collection Condition Survey.
Interpretive plan or education master plan	Park's Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.
Furnishing plan	Park's Historic Furnishings Report, as applicable.
Investment policy	Not applicable to US Government.
Annual reports produced within the last three years	Cross-reference the park's Annual Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report provided above.

Figure B. 1. Attachments Required for Self-Study:
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents (continued)

AAM Documents, If Available	NPS Equivalents, If Available
Printed descriptive materials pertaining to any membership/donor programs (should include dues and benefits structure for each program)	Information on National Park Foundation at http://www.nationalparks.org/Home.asp.
Individual donor support policy	Director's Order #21, Donations and Fundraising, http://data2.itc.nps.gov/npspolicy/DOrders.cfm.
Business support policy	Director's Order #21, Donations and Fundraising, http://data2.itc.nps.gov/npspolicy/DOrders.cfm.
Completed RC-AAM Standard Facility Report	Completed NPS Checklist for Preservation and Protection of Museum Collections (from Automated Checklist Program in ANCS+).

Note: A complete Accreditation Self-Study consists of a detailed questionnaire plus the attachments. The Self-Study Questionnaire is not available on the AAM Web site. Accreditation Program participants can get a copy by calling 202-289-9116 or e-mailing accreditation@aam-us.org. The questionnaire is available to others by purchasing the Accreditation Resource Kit from the AAM Bookstore.

Figure B. 1. Attachments Required for Self-Study:
AAM Documents and NPS Equivalents (continued)